

RESEARCH NOTE NC-18

NORTH CENTRAL FOREST EXPERIMENT STATION, FOREST SERVICE—U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Activity Patterns of Campers

Families camping in auto campgrounds on the Huron-Manistee National Forests were studied in 1962.¹ Among other questions, the campers were asked how much time they had spent in various activities on the day prior to the interview. This is a report on the replies to this question.²

The average time budget of the campers is shown below.

Activity ¹	Hours	Percent
Relaxation	8.3	67
Swimming	1.1	9
Fishing	1.0	8
Auto sightseeing	.9	7
Picnicking	.4	3
Hiking	.3	2
Boating	.1	1
Nature study	.1	1
Gathering forest products ²	.1	1
Canoeing	.1	1
Waterskiing	(³)	
	⁴ 12.4	100

¹ Travel and miscellaneous activities such as photography and rock collecting are not included.

² Gathering berries, pine cones, mushrooms, flowers, etc.

³ Less than 0.5 hour.

⁴ Some of the campers had arrived the day prior to the interview and had not spent a complete day in the campground; hence the total number of hours is less than 16.

Obviously campers don't spend very much time at any one activity other than relaxation. In this case, relaxation may be a misnomer since it includes camp chores as well as general loafing, reading, visiting, and so on. Less than 10 percent of the day is spent in the next most time-consuming activity, swimming.

The fact that most of the campers' time is spent in and around their campsite means its immediate environment may be a most important determinant of satisfaction. Relaxation as used here is so broad that specific recommendations as to design factors that might enhance it cannot be made. For example, visiting with neighboring campers is one form of relaxation; meditation is another. The types of environment conducive to these two forms are very different. The point, often made, is that a variety of environments within and between campgrounds is probably desirable.

The relative time spent in an activity, however, is not necessarily a valid measure of importance or satisfaction. The frosting on a cake is only a small proportion of the total volume, but its importance is well known.

¹ King, David A. 1965. *Characteristics of family campers using the Huron-Manistee National Forests*. U.S. Forest Serv. Res. Pap. LS-19, 11 pp., illus. North Central Forest Exp. Sta., St. Paul, Minn.

² Replies were obtained from 1,606 individual members of camping families.

Another way of looking at what campers do is the proportion participating in each of the activities:

<i>Activity</i> ¹	<i>Percent of campers</i>
Relaxation	93
Swimming	40
Auto sightseeing	35
Fishing	32
Hiking	20
Picnicking	19
Boating	8
Nature study	8
Gathering forest products ²	6
Canoeing	3
Waterskiing	(³)

¹ Travel and miscellaneous activities such as photography and rock collecting are not included.

² Gathering berries, pine cones, mushrooms, flowers, etc.

³ Less than 0.5 percent.

Relaxation is again the most popular activity, and swimming the second most popular. A slightly higher proportion of campers participated in auto-sightseeing than in fishing, but the proportion of time spent in fishing was slightly higher.

Because camping involves essentially three picnics a day, it may seem surprising that so many campers picnicked elsewhere than in the campground. However, a large part of this was probably done on sightseeing trips.

Waterskiing ranks low because the lakes included in the study area are too small to provide good waterskiing opportunities.

Significantly, except for relaxing, no one activity was engaged in by a majority of the campers. This result, found in other studies as well,³ illustrates the characteristic heterogeneity of camping as a recreation activity and the multitude of reasons people may have for camping. Diversity in the kinds of facilities provided is an important consideration in recreation planning.

Of course, what the campers do depends on the facilities and resources available, in addition to their interests and preferences (table 1). Activities that are only loosely tied to facilities, such as hiking, gathering forest

³ Alden, Howard R. 1965. *Characteristics and preferences of recreationists in selected northern Idaho state parks*. Forest, Wildlife, and Range Exp. Sta., Univ. Idaho, Moscow. 2 pp. illus.

Table 1.—Percent of campers participating in various activities by campground type

Activity	River and stream (n=530)	Lake, no beach (n=16)	Lake, beach (n=1,060)
Relaxation	91	87	94
Auto sightseeing	40	48	31
Fishing	26	47	33
Swimming	18	17	54
Picnicking	14	17	21
Boating	0	14	12
Canoeing	(<u>1</u> /)	0	4
Hiking <u>2</u> /	29	17	17
Gathering forest products	18	7	4
Nature study	10	8	7

1/ Less than 0.5 percent.

2/ Gathering berries, pine cones, mushrooms, flowers, etc.

products, and nature study, are more likely to be engaged in by the campers using river or stream campgrounds. These activities are also more closely tied to a natural or primitive environment than are other activities. In general, the river-stream campgrounds on these forests are less highly developed and are smaller than the lake campgrounds. Thus, interest in these activities may be related to a preference for the less crowded, more primitive campgrounds.

All but one of the river-stream campgrounds were rated by Forest personnel as having good or outstanding fishing. But fishing at these campgrounds ranks slightly lower in popularity than auto sightseeing and hiking, whereas at the lake campgrounds fishing is more popular. This may be because stream fishing is more demanding physically and requires, perhaps, more specialized skill than lake fishing.

Although the larger lake campgrounds tend to receive the emphasis in interpretive programs, the need for hiking trails, nature trails, and interpretive programs appears to be greatest at the river-stream campgrounds.

An attempt to relate activity participation rates to the socio-economic characteristics of the campers showed no important associations.

These results point toward the need for diversity and variety in campground design, environment, and facilities for associated activities. A relation between type of campground preference and activity preferences is also indicated; this should be explored further since it may be an avenue to the definition of different kinds of camping. Better definition should improve our ability to relate participation to socio-economic variables and, hence, to predict use. The apparent greater demand for nature-oriented activities at the more primitive, stream campgrounds shows a need for the development of nature and hiking trails at them as well as at the larger, more popular campgrounds.

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